



History 101

Pancho Villa

Francisco "Pancho" Villa (5 June 1878 – 20 July 1923) was a Mexican revolutionary general and one of the most prominent figures of the Mexican Revolution. As commander of the División del Norte, in the Constitutionalist Army, he was a military-landowner of the northern Mexican state of Chihuahua.

Given the area's size and mineral wealth, it provided him with extensive resources. Villa was provisional governor of Chihuahua in 1913 and 1914. Villa can be credited with decisive military victories leading to the ousting of Victoriano Huerta from the presidency in July 1914. Villa fought his erstwhile leader in the coalition against Huerta, "First Chief" of the Constitutionlists Venustiano Carranza. Villa was in alliance with southern revolutionary Emiliano Zapata, who remained fighting in his own region of Morelos. The two revolutionary generals briefly came together to take Mexico City after Carranza's forces retreated from it. Later, Villa's heretofore undefeated División del Norte engaged the military forces of Carranza under Carrancista general Álvaro Obregón and was defeated in the 1915 Battle of Celaya, and again by Carranza, 1 November 1915, at the Second Battle of Agua Prieta. Villa's army collapsed as a significant military force.

Villa subsequently led a raid against a small U.S.-Mexican border town resulting in the Battle of Columbus on 9 March 1916, and retreated to escape U.S. retaliation. The U.S. government sent U.S. Army General John J. Pershing on an expedition to capture Villa, but Villa continued to evade his attackers with guerrilla tactics during the unsuccessful, nine-month incursion into Mexican sovereign territory. The mission ended when the US entered World War I and Pershing was recalled.

In 1920, Villa made an agreement with the Mexican government to retire from hostilities, and was given a hacienda near Parral, Chihuahua, which he turned into a "military colony" for his former soldiers. In 1923, as presidential elections approached, he re-involved himself in Mexican politics. Shortly thereafter he was assassinated.

In life, Villa helped fashion his own image as an internationally known revolutionary hero, starring as himself in Hollywood films and giving interviews to foreign journalists. After his death, he was excluded from the pantheon of revolutionary heroes until the Sonoran generals Obregón and Calles were gone from the political stage. Villa's exclusion might have contributed to his continued posthumous acclaim.

In 1976, his remains were reburied in the Monument to the Revolution in Mexico City in a huge public ceremony. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pancho_Villa]

